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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 000268

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DEPT FOR AF/C

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/09/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR FINR BY SF

SUBJECT: BURUNDI TALKS WITH FNL TO CONTINUE IN PRETORIA?

REF: A. BUJUMBURA 267 (NOTAL)

¶B. BUJUMBURA 237

Classified By: Charge d' Affaires Ann Breiter for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D.)

¶1. (C) The South African facilitation mission has proposed to hold a special set of talks between the Government of Burundi (GOB) and the rebel PALIPEHUTU-FNL in Pretoria, according to South Africa's Institute for Strategic Studies analyst Jan van Eck. In a conversation on April 6, Van Eck privately expressed doubts that either the GOB or the FNL would enthusiastically support the venue for the talks. He opined that the facilitator had proposed Pretoria in order to lend status to the proposed discussions and to be able to draw a wider range of experts into the mediation.

¶2. (C) Van Eck, who enjoys high level access to both FNL leaders and to senior government officials, has spent most of the last two weeks in Burundi. He traveled to Dar es Salaam during the weekend of April 1 in order to meet with FNL leaders there. Van Eck said he made that trip in order to inform FNL leadership there that the GOB believed it had never agreed to continue discussions on outstanding issues (reflets.) FNL leaders received the news stoically, according to Van Eck; he believed the FNL could still be convinced to return to the table.

¶3. (C) The FNL's biggest concern, continued Van Eck, remains their demand that the GOB provide food supplies for their troops. If the government does not provide sufficient food rations, the FNL warned Van Eck, their commanders might lose control over their forces who will be forced to find alternative means of finding food sources. Van Eck cautioned that this issue alone could lead to destabilization of the country, almost without warning.

¶4. (C) Van Eck downplayed suggestions that the South African facilitators had expressed concerns about his own interventions with the FNL (Ref A). He noted that he has worked closely with the facilitators throughout the process and would continue to do so, adding that he was prepared to return to Dar if necessary to intercede with the FNL. Embassy subsequently learned on April 7 that Van Eck, who had originally planned to return to Pretoria on April 8. had deferred his return in favor of a return through Dar es Salaam to negotiate a venue for talks.

BREITER